United Nations

Press Release

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees asks South African Government to clarify its position on amnesty and any other obstacles that prevent repatriation process for refugees and political exiles.

- Secretary-General appoints Ingrid Lehmann Director of United Nations Information Centre in Washington, D.C.

- Food and Agriculture Organization to send mission to assess food and crop damage in Bangladesh.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Sadako Ogata, has asked the South African Government to clarify its position on amnesty, as well as any other obstacles that prevent UNHCR from beginning a repatriation process for South African refugees and political exiles.

In a statement issued in Geneva today, Mrs. Ogata said she was prepared to send a high-level delegation to South Africa to conclude negotiations once those clarifications are received. She said she feared momentum was being lost in the negotiations and that of all the outstanding issues, the most crucial -- that of amnesty -- remained elusive.

In a communication last Friday, the South African Government said the draft memorandum of understanding still presented major problems. It said clauses regarding the issue of amnesty were unacceptable and would require extensive discussions.

The UNHCR estimates that about 40,000 South Africans scattered around the world will apply for voluntary repatriation.

In a related development, the Special Committee against Apartheid has expressed grave concern that 18 months after adoption of the United Nations Declaration on Apartheid, the South African authorities have failed to establish a climate conducive to negotiations.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

In a statement dated 6 May, the Chairman of the Committee, Ibrahim Gambari of Nigeria, said Pretoria had yet to comply fully with agreements reached with the African National Congress (ANC) last summer. He noted that the 30 April deadline set for the release of political prisoners and the return of exiles had passed, while many prisoners remained in jail and thousands of exiles had not yet been allowed to return to their country. In fact, he said some of the exiles that had been able to return had been subjected to detention and harassment by the security forces.

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Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar has appointed Ingrid Lehmann as Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Washington, D.C. which provides services to the United States.

A national of Germany, Ms. Lehmann was Chief of the Peace and Security Programmes Section in the Department of Public Information (DPI) at United Nations Headquarters before the appointment. She has held various posts in the Organization including District Supervisor for the Windhoek Electoral District in Namibia with the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG), and Chief of DPI's Non-Governmental Organizations Section in New York.

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The European Economic Community (EEC) has rejected criticism from Iranian and Turkish authorities to the effect that the international response to the crisis of the Kurdish refugees had been insufficient.

In a press communiqué yesterday, the delegation of the European Commission said the criticism of its efforts was based on partial or mistaken figures relating to aid sent in by donors, especially EEC and its member countries. The Commission said the figures often reflected only aid which had been administered by a specific non-governmental organization, or requested by a particular institution. It was clear, the Commission said, that it had donated more than Iranian and Turkish officials had acknowledged.

The Commission said it was in close contact with the Turkish authorities in an effort to smooth out difficulties which could reduce the efficacy of the aid and to clarify the figures concerning the total EEC effort.

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The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) announced today that it is sending a fact-finding mission to Bangladesh and setting up a local emergency team to carry out on-site assessment of crop damage and food aid needed. The agency said it was also providing $800,000 for two emergency projects.

The cyclone and tidal wave which struck at mid-point in the harvest period of the winter grain crop caused serious damage, but no complete assessment of the damage has been undertaken.

FAO Director-General Edouard Saouma has appointed the Agency's Representative in Bangladesh, P. Myers, to head the emergency team which will assess the extent of damage to agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries as speedily and completely as possible.

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